

ARTS & CULTURE

Helidon Xhixha's sculptures light up Firetti Contemporary's debut show



DUBAI: Firetti Contemporary, Alserkal Avenue, Dubai, is presenting a solo exhibition of monumental artworks by international sculptor Helidon Xhixha, at its debut opening show (Mar 22 – May 22). Titled IMPRINT, it will showcase three monumental sculptures: Earth, a sphere in mirror polished stainless steel; Pillar of Fortitude, a seven metres tall stainless-steel column and Iceberg, a floating installation in stainless steel, measuring 4 x 2 metres. Xhixha creates three-dimensional and often large-scale works that refract and reflect the environments in which they are placed, most famously through carefully engineered works of polished steel. "I don't sculpt materials," he has said. "Rather, I use materials to sculpt light." Though he has extensively worked with glass, steel has remained his primary Muse and material for over a half a decade. He presents a grand spectacle: Art that challenges the audience.

↑ **Helidon Xhixha.**

Not just through sheer scale and mass, but also through engagement with ideas of fundamental importance. "While highlighting social and environmental issues, our gallery's mission is to become a vehicle for social change, instilling values in our society through the inspirational power of art. "Opening our first exhibition with a focus on what's considered the greatest threat to humanity; Helidon Xhixha's large-scale, stainless steel sculptures, are going to make a powerful statement on climate change," says Mara Firetti, Founder, Firetti Contemporary. Iceberg is by far the most symbolic and impactful work by the artist, in support of the awareness of global warming and the melting of polar glaciers. The

floating installation was first exhibited in the middle of the Venetian lagoon on the occasion of the 56th Venice Biennale, 2015. It won the attention of industry professionals and media alike, as it glided through the Canal Grande and the Venetian lagoon. The reflective work of art made a statement about global warming and the potential impact it could have on a place such as Venice in future.

Parallel to the environmental message, Earth provokes thoughts on the impact of climate change – a global problem that will affect every individual on each of the seven continents of the world. The installation works in conjunction with Iceberg, acting as its terrestrial counterpart, and memorialises the continued damage we inflict upon the planet. "Xhixha has done his part, creating art that uses its beauty to incite positive dialogues on issues that need to be addressed. It

↑ **Helidon Xhixha's Earth.**

is now up to you, the audience, to make sure the message reaches as far as possible and inspires as many as possible. Art needs its audience to invigorate change," adds Firetti.

Xhixha creates sculptures which serve to communicate their meaning – without this, they would not engage viewers and the ecological message would have been lost.

"The puzzle of deterministic chaos is just one example from twentieth-century science that shows how the limitations of human understanding make nature appear noisy, complicated and unpredictable... (But) behind the veil of apparent randomness, many processes in nature are highly ordered, following simple rules," Xhixha says.

"Xhixha immediately distinguishes himself from other artists," opines Albanian artist Fani Zguro in Vienna Contemporary Magazine, "with the lack of any infantile or senile reference to Albania, origin, or nostalgia.

"Almost all of our artists make a standard reference to their past. The personal becomes political and the artwork, an autocertifiable process. This is especially common for artists coming from these territories and former overthrown regimes, regardless of their brilliant level of creation. "All of this does not exist for Helidon Xhixha. He is not tempted by the past; the main feature of his work is not nostalgia or recycling phenomena of past days for the archives of current historiography. "In Xhixha's work what takes form is the energy, with all its typologies of matter that create the events." Xhixha is an Albanian-born artist, but Italian by adoption, whose monumental sculptures and innovative technique in stainless steel, often

fuse with other mediums such as marble or brass.

Born into a family of artists, he inherited his interest for Fine Arts and passion for sculpting from his father, who, among other things, was a state portraitist for the Albanian government. Xhixha graduated from the Academy of Arts in Tirana, Albania, where he was a part of a rising period in Albanian art. He then moved to Italy, where he attended the Brera Art Academy of Milan.

Graduating from the Brera, his creations included works in Murano glass and sculptures in stainless steel. He was also awarded a scholarship to Kingston University, London, where he developed techniques in engraving, sculpting and photography. In the early 2010s, he began producing sculpture works inspired by Dubai and the UAE. He initially visited Dubai in 2001, but delivered his first public monument to the city in 2012, entitled Elliptical Energy. He has also exhibited at Design Days Dubai. Firetti Contemporary is an art gallery that highlights social and environmental issues, attempting to create meaningful and sustainable collections. It was founded by Mara Firetti, an entrepreneur dedicated to the promotion and growth of international artists. Organising public events and international exhibitions in renowned institutions and art fairs has allowed her to acquire a large portfolio of high-profile art collectors, and extensive experience as a press officer for artists, with a network of important relationships. In the past fifteen years as art advisor and artist promoter, she has mainly dedicated her expertise in developing the career of Xhixha. In her team are two art professionals, Sossy Dikijian and Celine Azem. Together, they share a passion for art and all it stands for.

Muhammad Yusuf, Features Writer